



Upper Snake Region Annual Habitat Report



2007 Activities and Accomplishments

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Issue 1

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Greetings.....and thanks for your interest in our first annual Regional Habitat Report. This is a brief summary of our activities to help folks better understand the habitat resources in the Upper Snake and know what's being done by IDFG to manage them. Habitat management isn't flashy but we have a deep conviction that "habitat is where it's at." As a veteran wildlife biologist once said, "we can't manage wildlife with parking lots and computers." Truly spoken. It takes real habitat, a resource that shrinks a little every day. Access for fishing and hunting is also part of our program. We hope you'll agree that 2007 was a productive and interesting year for the Upper Snake regional habitat program.

This newsletter will be posted on the IDFG website on the "Wildlife" page, under "Habitat Newsletter" (Upper Snake). If you find it interesting, please tell your friends or pass it along. We can most effectively serve the public when they stay informed and involved, so if you have questions or want to share your thoughts, please give us a call.

Chester Wetlands Project is Completed

Chester Wetlands, a part of the Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area just north of St. Anthony,

helped plan the renovation which was aimed at improving water delivery, restoring wetland hydrology and creating new open water ponds in this important area.



underwent a facelift during the past year. In cooperation with Ducks Unlimited, and using a grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), habitat at Chester Wetlands was dramatically improved. Ducks Unlimited biologists

This aerial photo shows the results of the project with open water ponds that are already attracting waterfowl.

Wildlife Management Areas

WMA Vision Statement

“Our WMAs will be managed to showcase exemplary wildlife habitat, promote positive working relations with neighbors and offer high quality wildlife-based recreational opportunities to the public.”

Sand Creek

Sand Creek WMA and Chester Wetlands Segment are located north of St Anthony. Both are very popular with hunters and fishermen.

A leak was discovered in the dike of Pond #3 at Sand Creek WMA in 2007. The pond was drained and engineers summoned to determine the best way to fix the problem. Late this fall, Upper Snake personnel made the necessary repairs. It is likely the pond will remain dry in 2008 while the manager makes other repairs and improvements.

Kari Dingman, the Sr. Technician for Sand Creek for the past four years recently accepted a position in Washington on a WMA there. She will be missed.

A controlled burn was initiated on the desert adjacent to Sand Creek in an effort to determine ways to better manage the brush component for both sage-grouse and livestock.

If you hunt Sand Creek during the fall you might notice livestock on the WMA. Livestock trespass is a common challenge in the fall. The manager is continuing to work with the permittees to reduce trespass.

Cartier

Cartier WMA is in Madison County along the Henry's Fork next to Beaver Dick Park. It is owned by the Bureau of Reclamation and managed by IDFG for waterfowl and upland habitat.

If you hunt Cartier WMA, don't be fooled by all the "deer" tracks you might see. While this is a good area for whitetail deer hunting, it is also an area where domestic goats are used to control the noxious weed, leafy spurge. With continued financial support from the Bureau of Reclamation, Cartier WMA has just completed its **7th** year of goat grazing to control this weed. The results have been impressive and the manager is actively working to determine how to maintain this success in the long term.

The Teton Regional Land Trust, using Cartier WMA as a keystone property, has nearly surrounded the WMA with lands protected from development by conservation easements. This effort will help protect the wildlife values at Cartier WMA.

Tex Creek

Tex Creek WMA is located 15 miles east of Idaho Falls. It is a popular big game and upland game hunting area and provides critical winter range for mule deer, elk and moose. It is a cooperative project with the Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Tex Creek WMA is hosting and supporting two research projects aimed at better understanding mule deer/elk competition and mule deer winter range habitat requirements. Both of these projects are through Idaho State University and the habitat study is funded by the Bureau of Reclamation.

As part of the research, Tex Creek personnel have established 6 exclosures intended to help determine the impacts that elk, deer and moose are having on the vegetation.

Wildlife Management Areas

Deer Parks/Farm Bill Coordinator

Deer Parks is located on the Snake River north of Menan. It is owned by the BLM and managed by IDFG. It was created as partial mitigation for habitat lost to Palisades Reservoir.

This year Deer Parks Wildlife Mitigation Unit underwent a change in management. Paul Faulkner, a veteran employee and most recently the Landowner Sportsmen Coordinator in the Upper Snake Region, took over a dual role as manager of Deer Parks WMU and as Farm Bill Programs Coordinator (a new position in the Upper Snake Region). Paul brings a lot of experience to the position including experience gained in the Military as he serves as a First Sergeant in the Air National Guard.

Paul has made a lot of changes in one year at Deer Parks including removing a dilapidated potato cellar and construction of a new shop.

As Farm Bill Programs Coordinator, he has been busy learning the federal programs and personnel and meeting with landowners interested in developing wildlife habitat on their property.

Mud Lake

Mud Lake WMA is a waterfowl production area located at Mud Lake/Terreton area. It is also a popular area for hunting upland birds, waterfowl and big game as well as fishing.

100 acres of bulrush and cattails were treated at Mud Lake to create open water pockets in thick cover. This should improve waterfowl use in that area.

Mud Lake WMA also planted 70 acres as food plots for wildlife, in particular waterfowl and upland birds. Personnel treated over 700 acres for noxious weeds on the WMA and re-seeded 30 acres to grass.

Market Lake

Market Lake WMA is located near Roberts. It is a waterfowl production area and is popular with waterfowl, upland bird and big game hunters.

100 acres of bulrush and cattails were treated at Market Lake WMA to create open water pockets in thick cover. This should improve waterfowl use in that area.

Market Lake WMA also planted 60 acres as food plots for wildlife, in particular waterfowl and upland birds. They treated over 500 acres for noxious weeds on the WMA, removed 5 acres of Russian olive to reduce corvid predation on duck nests and installed 68 headgates to better utilize irrigation water.

Did you know?

Idaho Department of Fish and Game owns or manages 86,362 acres of land for wildlife habitat in the Upper Snake Region. In 2007, we estimated at least 108,500 visitor days to these properties, of which 61% were related to hunting or fishing. Thirty nine percent of our visitors were there just to enjoy wildlife viewing or the scenic beauty of these areas.

Pheasant Releases Continue

In the Upper Snake Region, pheasant releases continue to be popular with hunters. In 2007, we released 2,500 roosters between Mud Lake, Market Lake and Cartier WMAs. Each bird cost \$16 so a special WMA pheasant permit is required to hunt them.

Youth hunting opportunity is one benefit of this program. In 2007, Market Lake WMA reserved one area for youth hunters. While this is a voluntary restriction, adults are asked to bring a youth along if they hunt these

In 2008, Mud Lake and Cartier WMAs will also reserve areas for youth hunting.

Mule Deer Initiative

The Mule Deer Initiative (MDI) is a concerted effort to improve mule deer habitat, populations and hunting and continues to be IDFG's top priority. Projects completed this year include planting 40,000 shrubs on winter range from Arco to Tex Creek. About 800 acres of existing CRP was improved by removing sod forming grasses and replacing them with native bunch grasses and forbs such as alfalfa, small burnet and milk-vetch. These species provide much better forage and cover, not just for mule deer but for a number of other native species as well.

Other projects that are underway include riparian restoration, beaver management, aspen management and research.

Did you know?

In the Upper Snake Region alone, thousands of acres of winter range are lost each year, mainly to housing and other human development. Habitat biologists work hard to minimize the impacts of developments on wildlife.

Winter Range

Winter range is critical seasonal habitat used by big game species. It must provide forage, a place to escape the more extreme weather found on summer ranges and security from disturbance so fat reserved garnered on summer range last as long as possible.

Habitat management plans are being developed for every major mule deer winter range in the Upper Snake Region. These plans identify threats to the winter ranges and propose strategies to address those threats. The plans also specify management activities to maintain and even improve winter range habitat.

Many of our projects, such as shrub planting, occur on winter ranges both on public and private property.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of many of our efforts to improve habitat for mule deer. This past year, AmeriCorps volunteer, Jo Cobb, served as our MDI Volunteer Coordinator and did a great job recruiting volunteers and accomplishing dozens of projects. Volunteers donated over 5,220 hours last year for mule deer and other fish and wildlife projects in the Upper Snake Region alone. Kevin Buchholz was honored as Volunteer of the Year for dedicating over 200 hours of service to wildlife.

This program is successful only because people like you are willing to give back to the resources that have been the foundation of our lives in the Upper Snake Region.

In 2008, AmeriCorps volunteer Randy Poole, will lead the MDI Volunteer Program.

If you would like to volunteer to help fish or wildlife, please call Randy Poole at 208/525-7290.

Aspen Restoration

Aspen habitats are one of the most productive, diverse and important habitats in Eastern Idaho, not just for mule deer but for a large number of other species as well.

But, aspen habitats have experienced a 65% decline in Eastern Idaho during the past century. There are a number of reasons for this decline including, fire suppression, drought and grazing which have led to conifer succession replacing aspens.

Habitat personnel have been working with the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group to educate the public about the need to restore aspen habitats. They have also been working with their counterparts in the Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands to identify projects that can help to restore aspen to the landscape. In 2007, The Department of Fish and Game partnered with the Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands to restore aspen in Island Park, Spencer, Teton Valley and Fall Creek. Other projects are pending.

Access Management

There are 55 access areas in the Upper Snake Region. They stretch from Teton Valley to Mackay and vary from well developed boat ramps to walk-in fishing access. Almost all of the 55 access areas require weekly maintenance and cleaning during the summer.

This program is different from the Access Yes! Program which pays landowners to allow access. Many of the access areas in the Upper Snake are owned by IDFG. Others are managed cooperatively with different agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management. Several are agreements with private landowners.



This boat ramp on the Snake River is an example of the type of access area owned and/or maintained by the Upper Snake Access Management Program.

Henry's Lake

Work should have started on Henry's Lake Frome Park boat ramp during 2007 but was delayed because of weather and permit delays. This project is a joint venture between Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Fremont County Parks and Recreation Department. Funding is secured and work will begin in 2008 to complete sidewalks, replace the boat ramp and add new docks.

Other Projects

The Access program also helps with a myriad of other projects. This year they helped Sand Creek WMA repair a leak in Pond #3 and install a new wildlife water guzzler. They assisted Boy Scouts in completing picnic areas at Mud Lake WMA and assisted the Southeast Region with their access program.

Did you know?

Over 300,000 sportsmen and women use IDFG managed access areas in the Upper Snake Region each year. With the exception of the South Fork Fee Area, there is no charge to use these facilities.

Big Lost River Access

This year the crew worked on a multi-year project to improve the access/camping area on the Big Lost River northwest of Mackay. This project included adding a concrete sidewalk that is wheelchair friendly that connects the restrooms and the wheelchair accessible fishing pier (see photo at right).

A trail was constructed at the Louis Rukavina access at the Mine Hill Road bridge which now provides canoe and float tube takeouts.

The Mackay Dam access area was cleaned and brush removed. The area was assessed for future renovations.



The Upper Snake Region is known for its passionate anglers and hunters, active conservation groups and non-governmental organizations. In addition, we are fortunate to have an outstanding group of scientists in our partner agencies and Universities that help IDFG to accomplish its mission. We are proud of our efforts and accomplishments over the past year, but we know full well that we could accomplish very little without the cooperation and support from the many groups and individuals who help us. In addition to the countless anglers who've simply expressed support for what we do, we'd like to thank:

IDFG Volunteers
Ducks Unlimited
Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
Mule Deer Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
Fish and Wildlife Service
Dr. John Kie
Dr. Terry Bowyer

Did you know?

Noxious weeds such as leafy spurge and knapweed have infested over 8 million acres in Idaho (source: Idaho Dept of Ag) reducing forage and habitat for wildlife by as much as 90% in some areas.

IDFG spends almost \$400,000 and thousands of hours a year to combat this menace to wildlife.

What is a Habitat Biologist?

A habitat biologist is a wildlife biologist who specializes in wildlife habitat. They understand the animals and the habitat they need in order to thrive.

The job of a habitat biologist is complex. Not only must they understand wildlife and habitat and how they interact, they need to be able to communicate those concepts clearly and concisely to a number of entities. Habitat biologists work with Land management and other government agencies, Non-Government Organizations and private landowners to promote wildlife habitat improvement projects, offer comments on the impacts of projects, such as housing developments, on wildlife and habitat and manage various Wildlife Management Areas.

Besides wildlife, habitat biologists need to understand subjects such as hydrology, farming and farm bill programs, grazing, fire, restoration of disturbed ground, weed control, statistics and computer programs. They routinely participate in game surveys, both aerial and ground-based, checkstations, animal capture, regulation formation and other duties as assigned.

Life is never dull for a habitat biologist!

Sage-Grouse Local Working Groups

The threat of listing greater sage-grouse as protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has never been greater. Listing would create dramatic changes in land management decisions and hunting seasons. The best way to ensure that the birds do not require listing is for landowners, sage-grouse enthusiasts and agencies to band together to resolve differences and work together for the preservation of sage grouse.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game has been very much involved with efforts to improve sage-grouse populations and habitat. Part of that effort has been involvement in local working groups to develop management plans where local input, conditions and concerns are addressed.

Currently, Upper Snake habitat biologists are involved in three local working groups developing plans and strategies to conserve sage-grouse on the landscape.

The Upper Snake Sage-Grouse Local Working Group completed its plan in 2004 after nearly 7 years of debate.

In 2006, the state of Idaho completed a state-wide plan that will help the newly formed groups complete their specific plans much more quickly.

The new groups, the East Idaho Uplands Sage-Grouse Local Working Group and the Big Desert Sage-Grouse Local Working Group, are making significant progress in formulating strategies that will improve sage-grouse habitat and help reduce the threat of ESA listing.

The Upper Snake Sage-Grouse Local Working Group has already tasted success when they cooperated to get a new powerline through critical sage-grouse winter range buried instead of overhead lines, saving grouse from powerline collisions and reducing perches for raptors.